

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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INTERIOR SUPPORTS LONG ISLAND (N.Y) WETLANDS CONSERVATION AREA

The Department of the Interior has endorsed Federal legislation calling for the protection, conservation, and development of coastal wetlands of Hempstead-South Oyster Bay, Long Island, "for fish and wildlife and outdoor recreation purposes." A bill now in Congress would authorize the Department to establish the Long Island National Wetlands Recreation Area.

In a letter to the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall said his Department is interested in this area because "there is a definite need for more open spaces and green areas in the vicinity of New York City."

The maximum area presently covered by the bill, H.R. 11236, would be about 16,000 acres located five miles west of Fire Island National Seashore.

The proposed wetlands area is used by fishermen and hunters, for boating, swimming, and digging for shellfish. Bird clubs regularly visit the region. Secretary Udall said that while he would not attempt to lessen the area's importance for recreational uses of other types, he believes its paramount value is for fishing and wildlife conservation. Shellfish depend upon the mud flats, while early life of fluke, striped bass, and winter flounder are spent in such tidal areas. Atlantic brant, diving ducks, and other waterfowl of the Atlantic Flyway winter in the waters of Long Island. Many shorebirds, rails and herons frequent the wetlands and nest in and about the marshy islands.

Interior's report on the legislation suggested several amendments, including a name change - "Long Island National Wetlands Conservation Area." Preservation would be a cooperative effort among local municipalities, the State of New York, and Interior. One proposed amendment would authorize Interior, in cooperation with the State, to determine what additional lands should be acquired for general outdoor recreation and directs Interior to encourage the State to use Land and Water Conservation Fund money to purchase such lands for the project.

About 10,000 acres of the area covered by the bill is now owned by the City of Hempstead and dedicated to conservation purposes. An additional acreage within the area covered by the bill is also in public ownership.

Another suggested amendment by Interior would provide that the cost of administering the area would be borne by the Federal Government except for recreational development, where costs would be shared.

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